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Interim report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1310 (2000) of 27 July 2000, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 2001, and requested me to submit an interim report on progress towards achieving the objectives of resolution 425 (1978) and towards completion by UNIFIL of the tasks originally assigned to it and to include recommendations on the tasks that could be carried out by the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

Maintenance of the ceasefire

2. From the end of July until early October, the situation in the UNIFIL area of operations was generally calm, except for numerous minor violations of the line of withdrawal, the so-called Blue Line. These violations were attributable mainly to Israeli construction of new military positions and fencing along the line; they were corrected in each case after intervention by UNIFIL. Minor Lebanese violations occurred as a result of shepherds or fishing vessels crossing the line; in a few instances, vehicles were driven across the line. For several weeks, Hizbollah maintained a post across the line east of Kafr Shuba. The personnel there stated that they had permission to be there but would leave if ordered to do so by the Government. UNIFIL repeatedly raised this violation with the Lebanese authorities but without effect. Hizbollah vacated the position on 7 October in connection with its attack across the Blue Line (see below).

3. In addition to these violations, there were daily incidents of Lebanese civilians and tourists hurling stones, bottles filled with hot oil and other items across the line at Israeli soldiers and civilians, some of whom were injured. On several occasions the soldiers fired warning shots and rubber bullets, which caused some injuries. Most of these incidents occurred at the so-called Fatima Gate west of Metulla. There was also friction at a tomb on Sheikh Abbad Hill (east of Hula), which straddles the Blue Line and is considered a holy site by both Muslims and Jews. In September, Lebanese civilians held several demonstrations east of Kafr Shuba, in some cases crossing the line. Rolf Knutsson, my Personal Representative, and Major General Seth Obeng, the Force Commander of UNIFIL, repeatedly urged the Lebanese authorities to take the necessary measures to put an end to those incidents and violations.

4. A serious incident occurred on 7 October. In the context of the tension in the Occupied Territories and Israel, about 500 Palestinians and supporters approached the line south of Marwahin to demonstrate against Israel. As the crowd attempted to cross the Israeli border fence, Israeli troops opened fire, killing three and injuring some 20. Since then, the Lebanese authorities have prevented further demonstrations by Palestinians on the line.

5. Later the same day, in a serious breach of the ceasefire, Hizbollah launched an attack across the Blue Line about 3 kilometres south of Shaba and took three Israeli soldiers prisoner. The attackers withdrew under cover of heavy mortar and rocket fire, targeting all

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Israeli positions in the area. More than 300 rounds were fired over a period of 45 minutes. The Israeli forces did not immediately return fire, but later fired at some vehicles from the air. Following this incident, the Israeli air force resumed flights over Lebanese territory, the flights take place almost daily, usually at high altitude.

6. Hizbollah has stated that its operation had been planned for some time in order to take prisoners and thus obtain the release of 19 Lebanese prisoners still held by Israel. The Secretary-General, who had been pursuing the question of these prisoners with the Israeli authorities, remains ready to work with the Governments of Israel and Lebanon with a view to resolving this matter.

7. On 20 October, in what appears to have been a local initiative, three Palestinians crossed the Blue Line east of Kafr Shuba and tried to break through the Israeli technical fence, which runs some distance behind the line. The Israeli forces responded with heavy fire. One of the three was killed; the others managed to get away.

Return of government authority

8. On 9 August the Lebanese Government deployed a Joint Security Force of 1,000 all ranks, which is drawn from the Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese army. The Force has its headquarters in Marjayoun and Bint Jubayl and carries out intensive patrolling, with occasional roadblocks. Lebanese security services have established a strong presence in Naqoura, and the Lebanese police have resumed operations in key villages. Although it is outside the UNIFIL area of operation, it is worth mentioning that the Lebanese army deployed in mid-September in the Jezzine area, which the de facto forces had vacated in January.

9. At present, Lebanese administrators, police, security and army personnel function throughout the area, and their presence and activities continue to grow. They are re-establishing local administration in the villages and have made progress in re-integrating the communications, infrastructure, health and welfare systems with the rest of the country. In late August the former Israeli-controlled area participated for the first time since 1972 in a parliamentary election.

10. However, near the Blue Line the authorities have, in effect, left control to Hizbollah. Its members work in civilian attire and are normally unarmed. They maintain good discipline and are under effective command and control. They monitor the Blue Line, maintain public order and, in some villages, provide social, medical and education services. On several occasions, Hizbollah personnel have restricted the Force's freedom of movement. The most serious incidents of this kind occurred after Hizbollah's operation on 7 October, one on the same day, the other four days later. In both, Hizbollah forced UNIFIL personnel at gunpoint to hand over vehicles and military hardware they had found on the terrain. UNIFIL protested all such incidents to the Lebanese authorities.

11. The Government of Lebanon has taken the position that, so long as there is no comprehensive peace with Israel, the army would not act as a border guard for Israel and would not be deployed to the border.

United Nations activities

12. UNIFIL monitored the area through ground and air patrols and a network of observation posts. It acted to correct violations by raising them with the side concerned, and used its best efforts, through continuous, close liaison with both sides, to prevent friction and limit incidents. However, UNIFIL so far has not been able to persuade the Lebanese authorities to assume their full responsibilities along the Blue Line.

13. At the end of July and in early August UNIFIL redeployed southwards and up to the Blue Line. The redeployment proceeded smoothly, with the Lebanese authorities assisting in securing land and premises for new positions. At the same time, in order to free the capacity needed for the move south, UNIFIL vacated an area in the rear and handed it over to the Lebanese authorities. In the interest of economy, UNIFIL continues to use its larger facilities in that area. A map showing the current deployment of UNIFIL is attached.

14. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continued to lead the efforts of the United Nations system in working with the Lebanese authorities on a plan of action for the development and rehabilitation of the area vacated by Israel. In this

effort UNDP cooperated closely with the United Nations Special Coordinator, Terje Roed-Larsen, who led the efforts at the international level together with the European Union and the World Bank. A donor meeting was convened on 27 July to gather support. Mr. Knutsson joined those efforts when he assumed his responsibilities in Beirut in mid-August. On 27 and 28 September UNDP organized in Beirut a conference of non-governmental organizations, funded by the Italian Government. As in the past, UNIFIL assisted the civilian population, using resources made available by troop-contributing Governments.

15. The clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance was an important concern, especially in connection with the redeployment. UNIFIL also assisted in humanitarian demining activities and set up an information management system for mine action. In Tyre, Lebanon, a regional mine action cell was established with the help of the United Nations Mine Action Service, which cooperated closely with the Lebanese national demining office. During the period, three children died and eight persons were injured by exploding mines and ordnance.

Observations

16. During the past three months there has been further movement towards the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Except for Hizbollah's attack on 7 October, the area was relatively calm. The deployment of both UNIFIL and the Lebanese Joint Security Force proceeded smoothly, and the return of the Lebanese administration is ongoing. While much remains to be done to restore the full range of government services to a standard comparable to that in the rest of the country, there has been tangible progress in that direction.

17. The sequence of steps foreseen in Security Council resolution 425 (1978) is clear and logical: the Israeli forces must withdraw, there must be no further hostilities, and the effective authority of the Lebanese Government must be restored. Thereafter, the Governments of Israel and Lebanon are to be fully responsible, in accordance with their international obligations, for preventing any hostile acts from their respective territory against that of their neighbour. It is relevant to recall in this connection that both Governments have committed themselves, despite misgivings, to respect the Blue Line established by the United Nations for the purposes of confirming the Israeli withdrawal in accordance with resolution 425 (1978).

18. I believe that the time has come to establish the state of affairs envisaged in the resolution. This requires, first and foremost, that the Government of Lebanon take effective control of the whole area vacated by Israel last spring and assume its full international responsibilities, including putting an end to the dangerous provocations that have continued on the Blue Line. Otherwise, there is a danger that Lebanon may once again be an arena, albeit not necessarily the only one, of conflict between others.

19. I had the opportunity to speak about these matters with the President and Prime Minister of Lebanon during my recent visit to Beirut. We also discussed Lebanon's need for international assistance to address longstanding problems, in particular the reintegration of the area that was until recently occupied. I appeal to donors to help Lebanon meet urgent needs for relief and economic revival in the south, pending the holding of a full-fledged donor conference.

20. The present report is being written at a time of high tension in Arab-Israeli relations and continuing confrontations in the occupied Palestinian territories. Under the circumstances, I deemed it prudent not to submit suggestions for the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in south Lebanon, as requested in paragraph 12 of Security Council resolution 1310 (2000). With the agreement of the Security Council, I propose to address this subject in the report that I shall be submitting prior to the expiration of the UNIFIL mandate.

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